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SUBJECT: IRAQI CHARGE IN KUWAIT DESCRIBES SUNNI/SHIA
TENSIONS AS OBSTACLE TO RESOLUTION OF BILATERAL ISSUES

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi called publicly following meetings with Kuwait's Crown Prince and Prime Minister on November 11 for further dialogue to advance the bilateral relationship. The Iraqi Charge d'affaires in Kuwait told POLCOUNS that Shia circles around PM Al-Maliki have delayed the resolution of border and debt issues with Kuwait as part of a deliberate effort to keep the pot boiling between the two countries. The Charge rebuked the USG for its perceived pro-Shia policies in Iraq. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi made a private visit to Kuwait on November 11, calling on Crown Prince Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah and Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Jaber Al Sabah. In a subsequent press conference, Allawi expressed appreciation for Kuwait's role in promoting stability and security in Iraq and called for further dialogue to cement the relationship. Allawi applauded Kuwait's decision to send an ambassador to Baghdad as a contribution to Iraq's security and stability and attributed the Iraqi delay in reciprocating to a burdensome "sectarian quota" system that is part and parcel of the present government's "sluggish and unclear" foreign policies.

Referring to Kuwaiti complaints of intimidation and foot-dragging on border issues, Allawi stated that "Kuwait sovereignty is an issue that is over and done with. We as Iraqis and state officials ought to open a new chapter where sincere dialogue and true cooperation is initiated for the sake of the historical and social bonds between the two peoples." Allawi claimed not to have any inside knowledge on the state of USG-Iraq negotiations on the Status of Forces Agreement, but said that if it were not signed he would favor extension of a UN mandate.

¶3. (C) During a November 13 follow-up call on Iraqi Charge d'affaires Fadhil Hamad Khudair Al-Azzawi, POLCOUNS asked for a read-out of the Allawi visit and also asked the CDA for his views on ongoing border issues and the likelihood that the GOI will soon designate an ambassador to Kuwait. Al-Azzawi, who sat in on Allawi's meetings with the Crown Prince and PM, said the Kuwaitis had emphasized the GOK's desire for a stable Iraq that would be a secure and non-threatening partner to its neighbors in the region. Allawi, for his part, had expressed contempt for the Al-Maliki government in Baghdad and said he hoped for U.S. and other international observers to play a role in ensuring that Iraq's upcoming provincial elections are free and fair. Al-Azzawi said Allawi also expressed frustration over the Al-Maliki government's sectarian quota system for distributing ambassadorships and other jobs.

¶4. (C) Turning to other items on the bilateral Iraq-Kuwait agenda, Al-Azzawi made the following observations:

-- Borders: Iraq accepts that the Iraq-Kuwait border was settled by UNSCR 833 in 1993; Kuwait's sovereignty is not an issue. The border has been clearly defined by the UN, but there are some "administrative details" to be worked out. Al-Azzawi disputed Kuwaiti claims that some 200 Iraqi farm families are presently occupying land that overlaps into Kuwaiti territory in one much-discussed location, saying instead that these families are located just inside the Iraqi side of the border and abutting -- but not infringing on -- Kuwaiti territory. The Kuwaitis, he said, want the families immediately to move some 50 meters further into Iraq to create more of a buffer along the border. They have also said they will build a complete "modern" town to house the families as soon as Iraq designates a building site (a claim that the GOK confirms). Al-Azzawi acknowledged that Iraq has dragged its feet on this offer, first designating an area near Basra for the site, then canceling the decision and failing to find an alternative. He attributed the delay to provocations by Iranian-backed Shia elements who have gone to the farmers and urged them to reject the idea of abandoning the "land of their ancestors." Al-Azzawi -- a self-described "secular Sunni who is married to a Shia" said he believed the border issue is one of several that Shia circles in the Iraqi House of Deputies use to deliberately keep the pot boiling and prevent reconciliation with Kuwait.

-- designation of an ambassador: Al-Azzawi said he believed a number of candidates for the position of Ambassador to Kuwait have been identified but these must first be vetted by the House of Deputies and subjected to the all-encompassing Iraqi sectarian quota system (a point Allawi made publicly).

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-- debts and reparations: Al-Azzawi acknowledged that Kuwait had made good-faith efforts to sit down with the Iraqi side to resolve these issues, but that GOI attitudes had prevented progress. He stated, for example, that the two countries' foreign ministers had agreed in January 2008 to convene a joint commission in September of this year to discuss border and reparation issues. Late in the planning, Al-Azzawi said, the GOI backed out of the joint commission meeting and sent, instead, a technical team headed by the Finance Minister with a mandate only to discuss financial issues. Al-Azzawi attributed the change in plans to Shia circles around PM Al-Maliki who wanted to prevent the final resolution of debt and border issues; these positions differed from those of the Iraqi Foreign Minister who, according to Al-Azzawi, wanted the issues to be resolved.

¶5. (C) Comment: Notwithstanding his claim that although he is a secular Sunni, he is also an objective Iraqi diplomat, Al-Azzawi revealed a decidedly partisan anti-Maliki and anti-Shia streak throughout his discussion. He rebuked the USG for its perceived pro-Shia bias in Iraq, stated that Basra is now "completely under the control of Iranian intelligence," and expressed bitterness over what he characterized as interference by Shia circles around PM Al-Maliki into foreign ministry affairs, particularly regarding appointments. Speaking in confidential tones, Al-Azzawi stated that the second-in-command in his Mission is a pro-Maliki intelligence agent who has taken to making administrative and personnel changes in the Mission without even consulting the CDA. Al-Azzawi openly admitted that he hopes some day to emigrate to the U.S., where he has a son who is studying medicine. While intelligent and well-spoken, Al-Azzawi is clearly a man who is not fully in charge of his Mission. He has a relatively low presence on the local diplomatic scene and does not seem particularly well looped-in. He was unaware, for example, that an Iraqi delegation is due in Kuwait next week to participate in the ICRC's Tripartite Commission on missing and unaccounted persons from the 1990 - 1991 Iraqi invasion and occupation, an event that includes the USG, UK, France, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq. End Comment.

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